

**ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATION
BY THE VA OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
IN RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS
REGARDING PATIENT WAIT TIMES**



**VA Medical Center in Phoenix, Arizona
December 20, 2016**

1. Summary of Why the Investigation Was Initiated

This investigation started after a complainant provided information on April 28, 2014 to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Inspector General (OIG) Criminal Investigations Division (CID) about alleged obstruction of an audit being performed at the time by VA OIG Office of Audits and Evaluation (OAE). The OAE team was reviewing the Phoenix VA Health Care System's (PVAHCS) appointment scheduling process and associated appointment wait-list improprieties.

OAE had requested the New Enrollee Appointment Request (NEAR) list from PVAHCS Enrollment and Eligibility office. The complainant told CID that PVAHCS records contained conflicting information regarding whether or not patients on the NEAR list were placed on the Electronic Wait List (EWL). The complainant believed that a VAMC service chief was attempting to alter the NEAR list before giving it to OAE to hide the true number of patients waiting for appointments at the PVAHCS.

2. Description of the Conduct of the Investigation

- **Interviews Conducted:** VA OIG staff interviewed the complainant and a supervisor.
- **Records Reviewed:** VA OIG compared two copies of the NEAR list.

3. Summary of the Evidence Obtained From the Investigation

Interviews Conducted

- The complainant stated that during the week of April 21, 2014, OAE had requested the NEAR list from PVAHCS staff. He or she explained that Veterans Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VistA) Progress Note screens indicated that patients' names were submitted to the EWL, but that the VistA scheduling screens indicated that patients were not placed on the EWL. He or she also stated that on April 24, 2014, a supervisor instructed his staff to run the NEAR list from January 1, 2013 to April 24, 2014 of newly enrolled veterans awaiting appointments at PVAHCS. The complainant added that the report contained more than 1,000 names along with the date the appointment was requested. The complainant further stated that the supervisor told all Eligibility and Enrollment staff to perform mandatory overtime, scheduled for Saturday, April 26, 2014. The purpose of the overtime was to place everyone listed on the NEAR list onto the EWL or to schedule appointments for all. The complainant stated that they were concerned about preserving documents and thought that if staff moved names onto the EWL, the NEAR list would be altered before OAE could review it. The complainant said, "Once the veteran is scheduled, they will come off that list and you will never know

they were on that list.” The complainant stated that supervisors probably received those instructions from a VAMC service chief. The complainant added that he/she believed that the VAMC service chief was going to clean up the NEAR list before it was provided to OAE. The complainant explained that he/she wanted to make sure that the NEAR list and the VistA records related to the NEAR list were turned over to OAE before the VAMC service chief had a chance to change them.

- The supervisor stated that the VAMC service chief or another VAMC employee had asked him to run the NEAR list. He stated that neither the VAMC service chief nor the other VAMC employee had asked him to move veterans from the NEAR list to the EWL. He explained that he had his team working over the weekend to determine if veterans already had appointments scheduled or had moved out of state and no longer needed an appointment. He added that he was supposed to brief the VAMC service chief on the morning of the interview about how many veterans needed to have an appointment scheduled. The supervisor stated that he did not believe that this was a secret list and that he was not aware of any secret list. He added that he did not know who places veterans on the EWL.

When re-interviewed, the supervisor stated that he met with the VAMC service chief and the other VAMC employee on a Tuesday after the VAMC service chief and the other VAMC employee had attended a meeting with OAE. He explained that the other VAMC employee had asked him to find out what a NEAR list was because, during the meeting, the OIG auditors had asked about it. He stated that, at the time, neither he nor anyone in upper management was aware of a NEAR list. He added that other VA employees had told him that the NEAR list was located in VistA. He said that he had gained access to the NEAR list and printed out a copy for the first time ever on approximately April 24, 2014.

He stated that when he first reviewed the NEAR list and noticed that a veteran had been waiting 477 days for an appointment, he was shocked. He recalled that his first thought had been “I really hope this person has not been waiting this long.” He stated that after printing out the NEAR list, he had wanted to “scrub” the report the same way he had with all other VistA reports. By scrubbing, he meant that he wanted to make the list smaller and more manageable so that when it was handed off to the Outpatient Clinic all they would have to do was make a telephone call to a veteran and set up an appointment. He stated that his intention was not to take anyone off the list, but to make a notation by the veteran’s name as to his or her status based upon his employees’ review of each veteran whose name appeared on the NEAR list.

He recalled telling his employees not to remove any names from the NEAR list, but to just make notes by their names. He stated that he did not know how to remove a name from the NEAR list. The supervisor also stated he did not know how to put people on the EWL because that was not a function of the Enrollment and Eligibility office. He further stated that he never asked staff to move veterans from the NEAR list to the EWL or to schedule an appointment for them. He explained that no one told him to make appointments for the veterans whose names were on the NEAR list or to remove their

names before sharing the report with OAE. He stated that he gave OAE staff a copy of the NEAR list around May 1, 2014 upon request.

Records Reviewed

- VA OIG compared the NEAR list obtained by OAE with the NEAR list the complainant provided. On the OAE-provided list, we found the notations described by the supervisor and determined that no veteran names had been removed. Our review did not disclose any evidence that the NEAR list had been altered to remove names before being given to OAE.

4. Conclusion

Our investigation found no evidence to support the allegation that the VAMC service chief obstructed, or attempted to obstruct, the OAE audit.

VA OIG referred the Report of Investigation to VA's Office of Accountability Review on August 27, 2016.



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For more information about this summary, please contact the
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